

Today Congressman Pete Stark (D-CA) joined Congressman George Miller (D-CA) in introducing “the Act to Leave No Child Behind,” with companion legislation introduced in the Senate by Senator Chris Dodd (D-CT). The bill makes a massive investment in children by providing all children with health care, improving social services to children, and increasing and improving services for early, elementary and secondary education.

“Many politicians, including President Bush, promise to leave no child behind,” Rep. Stark said. “It’s time to put our money where our mouths are. By providing better healthcare coverage, social services and improving education, this bill makes the critical investments we need to protect and raise our children in the 21st century.”

The Act to Leave No Child Behind incorporates Congressman Stark’s “MediKids Health Insurance Act of 2001.” The MediKids legislation creates a new federal health insurance program modeled after Medicare. Under this legislation, all children would be enrolled in MediKids at birth and would remain enrolled in the program until age 23. Parents, who have other coverage for their children, employer provided, individual marketplace etc., could maintain that coverage. If that coverage were ever taken away, however, their children would automatically have MediKids coverage.

The Act to Leave No Child Behind also increases access to affordable childcare and expands the Head Start program. It encourages parents to stay at home when their children are born or sick by paying for family and medical leave. The bill improves education by expanding reading programs, reducing class size and investing in qualified teachers. Finally, the bill improves access to child nutrition programs, increases access to housing for poor families and improves social services for children.

Rep. Miller, the ranking Democrat on the House Education and the Workforce Committee, said: “America must make a choice when it comes to the future of our neediest children. We must choose whether we will invest in the healthy development of the next generation of our children or whether we will invest in the stock portfolios of the richest one percent of taxpayers in this country. We cannot do both. We must help the children.”

The bill is supported by a wide range of advocacy groups, including the Children’s Defense Fund, the AARP and the American Baptist Churches USA. Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF), said: “The Act to Leave No Child Behind builds upon the know-how and best practices for helping children and families. The Act incorporates sound legislative proposals sponsored by Senators and Representatives from both parties. In this period of peace and prosperity, it is affordable, achievable, and

timely."

Rep. Stark concluded: "No other issue in our country is more important than protecting and providing for our children. It is easy for politicians to say they are working for our kids. What we must do now is act. This bill goes a long way toward improving the lives of all children. I look forward to working with my colleagues to move forward on this important initiative."